

REMARKS**Claim Rejections under 35 U.S.C. 102(e) and 103(a)**

The claims stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) as being anticipated by Smirnov et al (Smirnov et al), U.S. Patent No. 6,279,009 (claims 1-3, 5 and 11), or under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Cheng (Cheng), U.S. Patent No. 6,067,548 (claims 4 and 6-10). Applicants request reconsideration of the rejection for the following reasons.

Patentability of the Claims as Amended

Applicants wish to emphasize the following features of the present invention:

- (1) A plurality of actual workflows are linked with the virtual workflow. Thus, as shown in Fig. 2, the actual workflow 2141 for a person in charge 1 and the actual workflow 2142 for a person in charge 2 are linked with the virtual workflow 200.
- (2) When nodes of actual workflows are linked with the virtual workflow, only a node whose process state can be disclosed to a person of another actual workflow is linked. This makes it not only possible to prevent inside information of the actual workflow from being leaked out to another actual workflow, but also makes it unnecessary to notify another actual workflow of all modifications made in the actual workflow. (See the disclosure from page 7,

line 27 to page 8, line 19 of the present specification, for example).

Independent claims 1, 3, 4, 6-8 and 11 have been amended to clarify the above noted two features, which, it is submitted, patentably distinguish the present invention over the cited prior art since these features are not disclosed or rendered obvious by the art of record.

Described in greater detail, the present invention is directed to a workflow system for managing work through the use of a plurality of workflow definitions. In particular, the invention provides two types of workflow, i.e. actual execution workflow (actual workflow) as the first type and monitoring workflow (virtual workflow) as the second type. Relationships between the two types of workflow are stored as workflow link definitions as set forth in Figs. 2-4 of the present application.

Progress information of virtual workflow can be acquired according to the present invention. Specifically, nodes whose progress states are necessary for monitoring the actual execution workflow are selected from the actual execution workflow. The selected nodes are linked with nodes of the monitoring workflow or virtual workflow by using the workflow link definitions. In this way, the progress states of the selected nodes of the actual execution workflow can be concisely displayed by mapping them on the virtual workflow.

The process of acquiring virtual workflow progress information is shown in Fig. 10 of the present application. This process makes it possible to acquire the information about how far the inputted virtual workflow has been processed and then to display the information to the user while maintaining system confidentiality with respect to the user concerning other information. See page 30, lines 15-24 of the specification, for example.

According to the present invention, the actual execution workflow definitions can be maintained with restricted access while the monitoring workflow definition can be presented to a cooperative external company that has appropriate access. Then, if the actual execution workflow is changed, the monitoring workflow may not have to be changed because such changes can be absorbed in the actual execution workflow. Thus, there is a degree of flexibility provided with respect to implementing changes in the system. That is, notifications of changes in the actual execution workflow definitions to the external party who is presented with the monitoring workflow definitions become unnecessary.

In the present invention, a plurality of actual execution workflow definitions may be linked with a single monitoring workflow or virtual workflow definition by means of workflow link definitions. This also provides flexibility in the system. For example, the same monitoring (virtual) workflow definition can be represented to a plurality of parties in

different ways as set forth in the specification with respect to the description of Fig. 13A-B.

With regard to the prior art relied upon by the Examiner, in the Smirnov et al patent, workflow is created by choosing a path in a model constituted by state nodes and task nodes. Since states of the actual world are reflected on the model, the workflow created from the model is updated as the model is updated. Thus, linking is not needed between the model and the workflow in Smirnov et al. Accordingly, Smirnov et al fails to disclose or suggest the above-mentioned features of the Applicant's invention.

The Cheng patent also fails to disclose or suggest the above-mentioned features, especially a distinction between a node whose process state is permitted to be disclosed to another actual workflow (i.e., a node linked with a node of the virtual workflow) and a node whose process state is inhibited from being disclosed to another actual workflow (i.e., a node not linked with a node of the virtual workflow).

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks,
reconsideration and reexamination are respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,



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